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ABSTRACT

The Vocational Advisory Council in Fairbanks, Alaska, conducted a two-year assessment of local vocational program delivery during the 1986-1987 school year. The purpose of the assessment was twofold: to review, analyze, and assess local vocational programs and delivery; and to expand the school-community partnership as it pertains to planning and maintaining high quality vocational program delivery. The project was conducted using a program committee structure according to which the vocational advisory council appointed an assessment project steering committee. Each steering committee member chaired or co-chaired 1 of 13 working committees. Eleven committees were program specific, and the remaining two committees addressed across-the-board concerns (the vocational support systems committee and the occupational needs committee). Each committee performed a structured assessment and submitted a written report to the steering committee. Synopses of the 13 reports were then incorporated into a final report along with recommendations for improving the district's vocational programs. The assessment process was found to produce valid and reliable results, enhance the local school-community partnership, and initiate a continuous program review process. (MN)

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USING THE LOCAL VOCATIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL TO PERFORM PROGRAM ASSESSMENT: A CASE STUDY

A Final Report on the Fairbanks Vocational Education Assessment Project

by

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Using the Local Vocational Advisory Council to Perform Program Assessment: A Case Study

by Carla A. Kirts[1]

A two-year assessment of local vocational program delivery was conducted by the Vocational Advisory Council in Fairbanks, Alaska. The project produced valid and reliable results, enhanced the school-community partnership, and initiated a continuous program review process. The structured approach used in this case can be applied and/or adapted to other situations.

Vocational educators strive to maintain programs which are parallel with the cutting edge of technology and commensurate with current local/community needs. To achieve such a goal requires cyclic review, analysis and revision of local vocational programming and delivery. Often this task places a burden on the local education agency's (LEA) personnel who are assigned many other duties and responsibilities. One way to alleviate some of this burden and yet accomplish this necessary mission is to utilize the expertise and commitment of the local vocational education advisory council. With minimum assistance and direction from LEA professional educators, Council members are capable of developing and implementing a long term process for evaluation and assessment of local vocational programs. This paper contains a description and analysis of how this process was accomplished in the Fairbanks (Alaska) North Star Borough School District (FNSBSD).

The phrases "learning by doing" and "hands-on learning" are instructional strategies championed by vocational educators. Although using a local vocational advisory council to perform program assessment is nothing new, perhaps other councils can benefit from experiences the FNSBSD Vocational Advisory Council gained during a two-year, vocational program assessment project. In a sense, this article provides a modified version of "learning by doing" -- learning by others' doings, or, better yet, learning by sharing.

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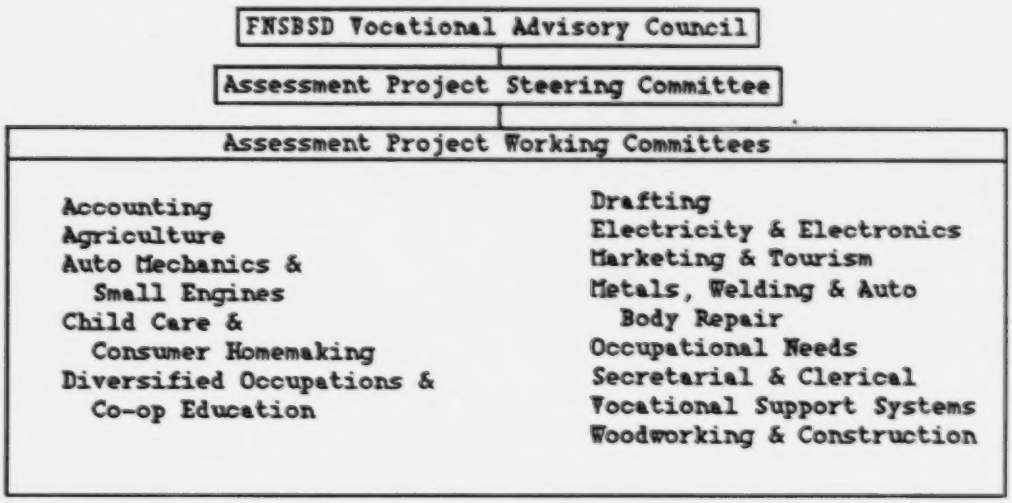
The Project Concept

During the 1985-1986 school year, a proposal was submitted to, and accepted by, the Alaska Department of Education. Carl Perkins funds were appropriated for 1986-1987. The specific purpose of the project was twofold: 1) review, analyze and assess local vocational programs and delivery, and 2) in doing so, expand the school-community partnership as it pertains to planning and maintaining quality vocational program delivery (FNSBSD, 1988). The assessment was to be performed by individuals representing a cross section of local business, industry, and public agencies. To accomplish such a task, the FNSBSD Vocational Education Advisory Council was named the project's Steering Committee.

The project was conducted using the program committee structure depicted in Figure 1. Each member of the Council/Steering Committee chaired or co-chaired one of the 13 working committees. Eleven committees were program specific, consistent with current vocational offerings within the LEA. The remaining two committees addressed across-the-board concerns. The Vocational Support Systems Committee reviewed counseling, administration, articulation, advisory councils, staff development, youth organizations, and seven other

Figure 1

Working Structure for the Assessment Project

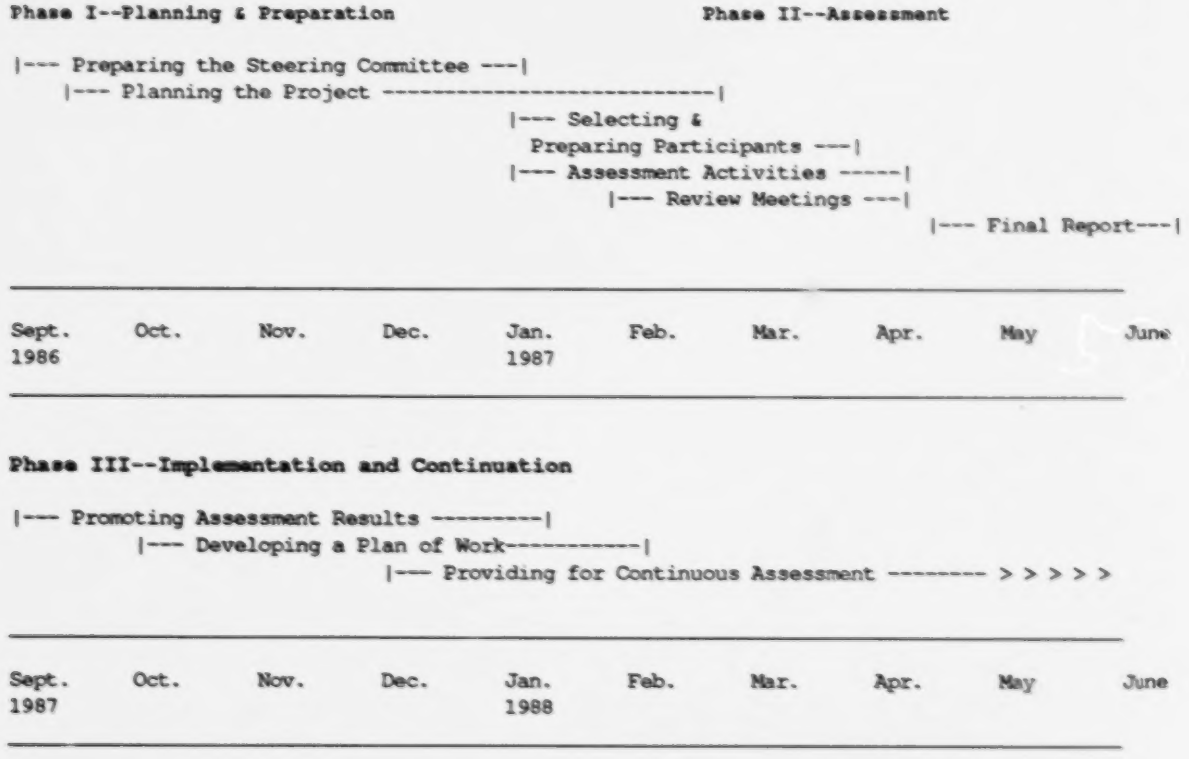


topics. The Occupational Needs Committee analyzed the community's employment status and needs, translating them into vocational program directions. Committee size ranged from 5 to 10 with nine committees having 8 or 9 members.

Each committee performed a structured assessment and submitted a written report to the Council/Steering Committee. Subsequently, a synopsis of all 13 reports was prepared by the Council/Steering Committee. The final report, including recommendations for the improvement of vocational programs in the district, was submitted to the Superintendent and local School Board. The second year of the project was used to begin implementation of the recommendations agreed upon by the Council/Steering Committee, administration, and the School Board.

To facilitate discussion, this description and analysis of the project will be divided into three phases as depicted in Figure 2: planning and preparation, assessment, and implementation and continuation. Strategies, activities, and constructive criticism for each phase are included. Each phase

Figure 2
Program Assessment Project Timeline



functioned to provide a valuable component in the network which made the project a success--an assessment using lay citizen input to provide direction for improved vocational education opportunities for local youth and adults.

Planning and Preparation

If one phase stands out as most valuable, planning and preparation must be recognized as such. Without this phase, the project's success may have been dependent on luck, accident or some other uncontrollable whim of fate. Recognizing this danger, The Council/Steering Committee assumed more direct responsibility for the outcome by spending four months getting ready to perform the actual assessment, which took five months. Adequate planning and preparation allowed time for anticipating problems and developing appropriate strategies for mitigating those problems. Steps in this phase included preparing the Steering Committee, planning the project, and selecting and preparing the participants.

Preparing the Steering Committee

After realizing the extraordinary scope of the project, several Advisory Council/Steering Committee members were apprehensive about assuming a leadership role in the assessment. Laments were common: "I don't know how to run a meeting;" "I'm not knowledgeable enough about vocational education to pass judgment on the programs;" and "I'm not sure I can make the time commitment."

To counteract these and other concerns, several worksessions were held during the Fall of 1986. Some occurred during regularly scheduled Advisory Council meetings and served as general brainstorming and "bull sessions." Concerns were aired. The Council/Steering Committee struggled to address each concern in a realistic and conscientious manner. Throughout this process, the members were surprised to realized how much competence was among them. Working together, they could solve many of the problems they encountered. The success of this self-directed process played an important role in boosting confidence.

Although these discussion sessions helped remedy many of the confidence problems, competence still needed attention. The most beneficial, instructional session featured a guest speaker who shared personal experiences from leading a

similar assessment project. An indepth comparison of the two projects and specific instructions regarding how to effectively chair the working groups proved to be the "meat that assembled the beasts." At this point, Council/Steering Committee members felt more confident and competent in their ability to effectively steer the project -- the group had become eager to initiate and direct the assessment. Planning the assessment process was to be their first major endeavor.

Planning the Project

Who was going to do what, and when? The actual assessment process had to be developed beyond that which was described in the proposal. Thus, working committee assignments, a project timeline, and an assessment instrument were developed by the Council/Steering Committee prior to performing the actual assessment.

All Council members were assigned to chair a working committee. Assignments were made carefully, considering the background and preferences of each member. Fortunately, all project committees were covered without any member expressing displeasure with the assignment. This is perhaps indicative of the balance in membership with which the Advisory Council was created. Members were carefully selected to represent the various cross sections of the community and current vocational program areas as specified by local, state, and federal guidelines (AK-DOE, 1985; FNSBSD-VEAC, 1987).

Two types of timelines were developed: one for the project as a whole, and one for each working committee. The project timeline was developed first. Working committees were given three months to complete their specific tasks and prepare their report for the Council/Steering Committee. The date for the first meeting to begin the synopsis of the 13 reports was established, thus becoming the completion-target date for working committee reports.

Each working committee chair assumed reponsibility for the committee-level schedule. Some were developed autonomously by the chair, and some were developed democratically by committee members during the first meeting. Each method worked well. The degree to which each committee stayed on task and on schedule was more a function of the chair's commitment, leadership, and organizational skills than the method of designing the original timeline.

Having 13 working committees posed a problem with respect to the uniformity with which the assessment would take place. An assessment instrument was required to facilitate continuity among the committees. As a result, a standard report form was created, the contents of which are delineated in Figure 3 (FNSBSD, 1988). The expertise of LEA personnel was essential during this planning step.

The 11 program committees used the standard report guidelines. However, due to the uniqueness of their missions, the Occupational Needs Committee and the Vocational Support Systems Committee developed guidelines more appropriate to their purposes. A thorough review of the meaning of each item in the report form was conducted to assist the committee chairs in understanding the specifics of the various assessment targets.

Some caveats regarding the use and misuse of the standard report were necessary, however. First, committee chairs were encouraged to use the report as a guide. It was not supposed to become a rigid, burdensome constraint, which could defeat its original purpose of facilitating the assessment process. Also, and more importantly, committee chairs were warned to avoid evaluating teachers, *per se*. This project was to be a program assessment, not a teacher evaluation. With guidance from local vocational education specialists, this point was well illustrated and generally well understood by committee chairs. However, this concern surfaced several times throughout the course of the project. It became a major consideration and a circumstance which was difficult for the study participants to totally avoid since vocational programs tend to reflect the vocational instructor, both in weaknesses and in strengths. This may be particularly important in one-teacher departments, as was true in this case.

Selecting and Preparing the Participants

While novice participation is needed to avoid producing an in-house, biased assessment, involving a predominent number of individuals unfamiliar with the inner workings of vocational education creates other risks. As was the case with the Council/Steering Committee, a major hurdle to overcome in a project involving community participation is the participant's inexperience and lack of confidence. At this point the Council/Steering Committee presumed that the

Figure 3
Working Committee Program Assessment Report

1. What are the major strengths of the district's vocational program support systems?
2. What does the committee view as the major needs in strengthening the district's vocational program support systems?
3. In the committee's view, what is the condition of the following support areas?
   - A. Structure and managment
     1. Vocational administrative structure
     2. Resource (fiscal) allocation system
     3. Vocational advisory council
   - B. Student services
     1. Counseling
        - a. Career planning
        - b. Course selection
        - c. Program/course availability
     2. Placement
        - a. Program completors
        - b. Early leavers
     3. Follow-up
     4. Student recruitment
   - C. Teacher training upgrade
     1. Technical skills opportunity
     2. Professional education skills opportunity
     3. Personal/self-improvement skills opportunity
   - D. Special need student populations
     1. Categories enrolled
     2. Needs and accommodations
   - E. Vocational youth organizations
     1. Co-curicular application
     2. Teacher/sponsor involvement
     3. Student involvement
     4. Student activities
   - F. Program articulation
     1. Programs within buildings
     2. Junior high/middle school with high school
     3. Comprehensive high school with career center
     4. High school and career center with postsecondary
        - a. Community colleges
        - b. Apprenticeship programs
        - c. Vocational schools/institutes
        - d. University (where appropriate)
   - G. School/community relationships
     1. Work experience opportunities
     2. Classroom use
     3. Field trip opportunities
     4. Public relations and communication
   - H. Vocational program management
     1. Program planning
     2. State/national standards
     3. Local/state/national trends
     4. School-community relationships/usage
     5. Physical plant (facilities)
     6. Curriculum development
     7. Other(s)
4. Further comments which should be considered by the district's Vocational Education Advisory Council in completing its project:

success of this type of assessment using lay persons would depend on 1) selecting committed, qualified individuals to serve as participants, 2) insuring that each working committee is representative of the various components of the vocational program to be studied, and 3) preparing the participants to perform the assessment in a valid and reliable manner. The committee chairs were designated to perform these three functions in a manner commensurate with the specific mission of their respective committee.

The Council/Steering Committee recommended that each working committee contain the following program representation (as applicable):

1) Chair (from the Steering Committee),
2) one junior high school vocational teacher,
3) one high school vocational teacher,
4) one career center vocational teacher,
5) one community college instructor, and
6) four to six lay citizens from various aspects of the program.

Thus, each committee was to be predominently community-based, while at the same time containing some program-specific expertise. Similarly, each level of programming, junior high to postsecondary, was specified since articulation was to be an important assessment subject. Parents of vocational students, former students, and program completers were considered when possible. However, some individuals from these groups were reluctant to serve, presumably because they were intimidated by the formality of the process. In general, these individuals were used in an *ex officio* capacity, as needed, when committees deemed it necessary to obtain particular perspectives regarding the program.

Each chair made a list of potential participants and identified aspects of the program requiring specific representation. For example, in order for the Agriculture Committee to parallel characteristics of agriculture in the community, horticulture, livestock and crop production, and agribusiness required representation. Thus, a greenhouse manager, machinery dealer, feed and seed store operator, and a general farmer became likely candidates. Subsequently, potential participants were called upon and briefed on the project to determine whether they were interested in serving on the committee. The time commitment necessary was stressed from the outset to each and every candidate. All Council/Steering Committee members felt this was a factor which could have a major impact on attendance and participation. Hence, no one wanted to

disguise the fact that accepting a role in this project would be a major time commitment.

To formalize the membership of the working committees, each participant who accepted the challenge received a "letter of appointment" from the Superintendent. The Council/Steering Committee perceived this as an important formality. It made each participant aware of the LEA's commitment to the project, and it lent credence to the amount of responsibility each participant had accepted.

Given that participants were carefully and thoughtfully selected, they had to be assembled and briefed on their charge. In this case, all 105 participants were invited to attend a evening event, a project kickoff. The Superintendent, School Board President and Council/Steering Committee Chair welcomed the participants and reaffirmed the importance and goals of the project. The Executive Director of the State Advisory Council on Vocational Education gave a keynote speech, emphasizing the value of a quality vocational education program. It became obvious to each participant that he/she was a part of "something big!"

Following these formalities, each committee assembled for an orientation meeting. This was the first opportunity for each participant to meet the other committee members with whom he/she would be working for the next several months. For orientation purposes, several items were distributed. A plastic, zippered brief case, personalized and imprinted with the LEA logo, was given to each participant. It contained a description of the project, a list of all other participants, several articles portraying the purposes and characteristics of quality vocational education programs, a notepad, and, of course, a pen with a vocational education phrase on it.

As the evening closed, participants departed feeling more comfortable their roles. Enthusiasm abounded. Now that the structure, process, and participants were in place, the actual assessment could commence.

Assessment

Given the quality of the planning and preparation phase of the project, the assessment phase was the easiest phase to accomplish. In essence, the validity and quality of the assessment of individual programs was dependendent upon the leadership, committment, and organizational abilities of the chair of

each working committee. This phase contains three components: assessment activities by the working committees, periodic reviews by the Council/Steering Committee, and preparation of the final report.

Assessment Activities

At this point in the project, the working committees took over. The actual assessment of individual programs was in their hands. Each committee developed a regular schedule for meetings. For most committees this was once a week until the report was complete and ready for submission to the Council/Steering Committee. Without exception, all program working committees conducted on-site visits before beginning specific assessment proceedings. All reports were filed within a week of the original deadline.

The assessment process took approximately three months. This was plenty of time for most committees; however, the Occupational Needs Committee and the Vocational Support Systems Committee desired more time. Given the nature and breadth of these committees' tasks, would any amount of time have been enough? Having a specific deadline given before committee deliberations began definitely expedited the process. Otherwise, those committees might still be deliberating!

Review Meetings

Council/Steering Committee meetings were suspended during this phase with the exception of a few, informal breakfast gatherings used to monitor the progress of the individual committees. For the most part, this procedure was used to prevent problems from becomming significant, recurrant, and hazardous to the integrity of the project. However, for obvious reasons, problems were not allowed to dominate success stories. Facilitating a positive atmosphere and efficient flow of discussion during these review meetings was the reponsibility of the Council/Steering Committee Chair.

As with the self-directed planning sessions, the group again found themselves to be quite capable of solving many of the problems by "putting their heads together." Also, as the breakfast table buzzed with enthusiastic conversation, individuals began to realize that, for the most part, their problems were not unique. Others were having the same or similar problems.

Apprehensiveness was reduced and confidence soared. The project stayed on time and on task. These periodic reveiw sessions conducted by the Council/Steering Committee performed an extremely important role in the ultimate success of the project.

Preparation of the Final Report

All working committee reports were submitted to the Council/Steering Committee. Hundreds of specified and implied recommendations were contained within the 147 pages the reports totaled. The Council/Steering Committee had the dubious task of preparing a synopsis from this overwhelming amount of material and information.

At this point, 3-4 hour long meetings were held several times a week over a two-month period. Where possible, subcommittees were designated to perform specific tasks to expedite the process. However, for the most part, the entire group preferred to discuss the development of the final recommendations. Heated debates; long, thought-provoking silences; and lots of chalk and eraser power characterized these intense sessions. Surprisingly, a great deal of similarity in terms of recommendations for individual program improvement surfaced from the 13 reports. These obvious, recurring themes lent credibility to the validity and reliablity of the assessment. The final recommendations had sound foundations.

The goal of this process was to condense the committee reports into a concise document covering only the major recommendations for local vocational program improvement. Brevity and precision were the keys. To do otherwise would be to create a lengthy, boring, detailed report that would dissappear among the stacks and stacks of documents the LEA administration and the School Board regularly acquire.

The contents of the final report included: 1) a one-page introduction, 2) a list of all participants, 3) a three-page synopsis of committee reports, and 4) seven major recommendations for program improvement. The introduction reaffirmed the purpose and scope of the project, the Council/Steering Committee's perceptions regarding the seriousness of the report, and a list of the subsequent contents of the report. The list of participants was divided by working committee and included the occupation of each individual. To anyone the

least bit familiar with the local community, the breadth, depth and reputation of community involvement was impressive. The three page synopsis included succinct "bullets" under the headings: strengths; needs; employment opportunities; placement; curriculum; facilities; equipment, materials, and supplies; program articulation; and additional quality components. These categories generally paralleled the committee report format.

The meat of the report was the seven major recommendations. To facilitate expeditious action on the results of the assessment, the recommendations were presented in a tabular format offering 1) short-term actions, 2) mid-term possibilities, and 3) long-term effects for each. A detailed example is provided in Figure 4 (VEAC, 1988). Given this format, the Council/Steering Committee not only told the administration and Board what needed to be done, but also presented them with realistic methods of accomplishing the changes within immediate and long-term time frames. This seemed appropriate in that one of the major purposes of the local Vocational Advisory Council is to be the "eyes and ears" of the administration and Board in matters affecting vocational education (AGCVCE, 1986). Every administrator and Board member cannot be expected to be intimately acquainted with the details of vocational education. Thus, the expertise of the Advisory Council becomes extremely valuable.

Figure 4
Example of Tabular Format of Recommendations

Recommendation	Short-term Actions	Mid-term Possibilities	Long-term Effects
Provide central, vocational leadership, with authority.	Redefine the role of the vocational coordinator and director.	Leader has specified role in hiring, budgeting, and evaluation.	Cohesive program delivery.
	Redefine & recognize youth organizations as co-curricular.	Compliance with new state standards and codes. Comprehensive planning becomes effective.	Unified program structure.
			Program accountability.
			Increased cost effectiveness.
			Role model for other districts in Alaska.

The next step involved presenting the final report to the Superintendent and Board. Distribution without discussion would have spelled death for the implementation of the recommendations. Thus, the final report became a working document. Its format facilitated a logical discussion of the entire project. The officers of the Vocational Advisory Council personnally discussed the results of the assessment project with the Superintendent. Subsequently, a presentation was made to the Board during one of their regularly scheduled worksessions. Hence, the final report was not only presented in a written format, but also in a visual, verbal format as well.

The presentation to the School Board required some special planning. Given the timing of the presentation, June, the Board was heavily involved in deliberations concerning future budgets. The local economic situation was making extensive cuts necessary. Therefore, in a realistic way, the Council thought it inappropriate to confront the Board with requests for additional funding and/or preferential treatment for vocational education when other areas such as physical education, gifted and talented programs, and extracurricular activities had already been seriously threatened. In this case, the "short-term actions" category of the final report proved to be a handy remedy to this dilemna. Few, if any of these suggested actions required budgetary activity. Hence, the Council emphasized that many of the changes necessary to improve local vocational programming could be accomplished without impacting the budget. The School Board appeared relieved and, subsequently, very supportive of the efforts to implement the findings of the assessment.

As mentioned previously, the assessment involved 105 individuals. The chairs of each of the working committees repeatedly remarked that many of the participants wanted to be informed regarding actions taken as a result of the report. Thus, each participant received a copy of the final report and each was invited to attend the presentation to the School Board. Furthermore, a certificate of appreciation on behalf of the LEA was given to each participant. It was signed by the Superintendent, School Board President and the Chair of the Council/Steering Committee. In the mean time, several participants in the study have remained actively involved in the implementation and continuation phase of the study.

Implementation and Continuation

If one phase could be designated as most difficult and challenging, implementation and continuation would qualify. Most Council members perceived the actual assessment to be the phase requiring the most effort and had few concerns about how and when the recommendations would be implemented. To some extent, there was a "let down" following the assessment phase. It was a if the Council thought their work was done. On the contrary, the real work had just begun. The steps in this phase include: promoting assessment results, developing a Plan of Work, and providing for continuous assessment.

Promoting Assessment Results

Besides the administration and the School Board, local vocational teachers also needed to be aware of the "ins and outs" of the assessment. Some teachers were apprehensive about the assessment from the beginning. Given the tension in the district as a result of the economic situation and the ensuing cuts by the School Board, some rumors about the assessment results, and how they would be used, had begun. Therefore, it was extremely important, and apropos, to directly present the results to the vocational teachers, many of whom would ultimately be responsible for implementing various aspects of the recommendations. Two opportunities to do such were taken: the annual, beginning-of-the-year, districtwide, teacher inservice; and the career center's in-house inservice.

Both presentations were made by Council members. The format generally consisted of a review of the study process and results and a liberal timeperiod for questions and further discussion. Given these two sessions, every vocational teacher in the district was afforded an opportunity to receive the same final report that the School Board received and meet the individuals directly responsible for the findings and recommendations from the assessment. For those few who did not attend either session, each school had at least one teacher who had served on a working committee. These individuals served as liaisons throughout the duration of the study. A similar means of communication worked well for the implementation phase. As much as possible, liaisons will be used through the continuation of assessment.

Developing a Plan of Work and Providing for Continuous Assessment

In September of 1987, the Council/Steering Committee, now acting as the regular Vocational Advisory Council, began to develop a plan for implementing the recommendations from the assessment. As with the project, planning became paramount. Subcommittees were constituted to prepare goals and objectives for the next several years. Specifically, components of the assessment recommendations, especially short-term actions, were directly incorporated into the Council's Plan of Work. Convening as a full Council, all committee reports were reviewed and condensed into three objectives: maintaining general advisory and operational functions; improving and promoting the image of vocational education; and implementing selected program improvement projects and recommendations. As with the assessment's final report, the format of the Plan of Work was designed to be brief and clear.

The *Plan of Work for the 1987-1988 and 1988-1989 Program Years* was adopted in February 1988. Again, planning consumed a great deal of time and effort. The document was only three pages, containing one objective on each page. In a tubular format, activities and outcomes were presented for each objective. In addition, the individual or group responsible for carrying out the particular activity, time lines, and funding methods were designated for each activity. Thus, the Plan of Work was intended to be a working document. Subsequently, Council members have selected and/or been assigned to perform certain activities within the Plan such that each objective is met during the programming period. Hopefully, this method of producing a functional Program of Work will provide for continuous review and revision of vocational programs in the LEA. Presumably, the extent to which this method works will be evident after the 1988-1989 school year.

When a group or organization is involved in a major undertaking, there is often a "let down" period afterward. This was definitely the case with the assessment project. The 1987-1988 year was a difficult one for the Council. Several resignations occurred. Absences at meetings increased. In general, there was a reduction in interest toward Council activities as compared with the previous year during which the assessment was performed. The officers of the Council have met on several occasions to attempt to remedy this situation.

Several strategies, including shorter meetings, have been proposed for trial next year.

In Retrospect

In review of the process and product of this assessment project, several strengths and weaknesses are evident. In general, the process was effective and the product useful. Vocational education in the district is more likely to improve. However, the well-being of the Council after-the-fact may become a major concern.

The design of this study aptly afforded the district an opportunity to perform an unbiased, external assessment. Given the specific strategies used to prepare the lay participants and the degree to which the various working committees produced similar recommendations, the study appeared to be reliable and valid. In fact, several recommendations paralleled those specified in a report prepared in 1982 by the Vocational Education Future Directions Committee, a group dominated by vocational educators (12 of 15). Obviously, vocational education within the LEA had received very little attention during the last several years. Participants in the 1986-1987 assessement project were not given access to that report which was prepared prior to the official establishment of the Vocational Education Advisory Council. Hopefully, the results of this assessment will be implemented such that similar reports prepared in the future are not as congruent, and instead, indicate the degree to which changes in a positive direction have occurred. This would certainly be an indicator of the degree to which this assessment, from review to implementation, was truely successful.

The school-community partnership was definitely strengthened via the process used in this project. Given that participants were carefully selected and the actual assessment proceeded in an extremely organized manner and without hesitation, vocational education in the LEA gained life-long friends, several of which are extremely reputable and highly respected local citizens. As a result of having participated in the assessment they have a better understanding of vocational education and are more committed to its improvement.

The degree to which the major recommendations from the assessment are implemented during the next several years will in part determine the project's

effect on the improvement of local vocational program delivery. In essence, the Council has the responsibility for making these recommendations happen. Thus, the results of the assessment project defines the role of the Council for the next several years. The Councils's *Plan of Work* incorporates all of the major recommendations and includes a provision for continuous review of local vocational programs. Several significant changes in local programming occurred during the 1987-1988 school year. If the Council follows the strategies outlined in the Plan of Work, other changes will follow.

For the next year or so, the leadership and mentorship provided by the officers of the Council will be extremely important. Specific strategies for overcoming the "let down" experienced during the 1987-1988 year will be needed. Perhaps the new Council members, those joining the Council due to term expirations and resignations, may be able to provide a new spark to the implementation phase.

This assessment project utilized a structured methodology. On paper, the process appears infallible, except for the fact that its success is determined by the quality and preparation of individuals selected to conduct the assessment. This was especially evident throughout the course of this project. The validity and reliability of the product was directly dependent upon the competence, leadership, organizational skills, and commitment of the individuals involved, especially those on the Council/Steering Committee. Allowances and adjustments were required. For instance, as the scope of the project became evident, two resignations from the Council/Steering Committee occurred almost immediately. These individuals felt overcommitted and/or lacked confidence and thought it best to resign at an early stage. This situation should be expected with this kind of project. Members of advisory councils are often selected because of their outstanding contributions in other activities. Hence, they tend to be busy individuals even before appointment to a vocational education advisory council. Conscientious members may opt to "bow out" rather than overcommit and fail to provide an outcome commensurate with what is generally expected of them.

At this point, a major caution is necessary. When using the advisory council in a project of this magnitude, "burn out" may occur. Steps to alleviate this stress may be necessary. For example, do not push the implementation phase. As is normal following large tasks and projects, momentum

will slow. It's almost inevitable. Allow this to happen. Expect and plan for it. Emphasize the objectives that are accomplished. Do not dwell on the tasks that did not get done. To do otherwise may jeopardize the membership, morale, commitment, and reputation of the entire Council.

In retrospect, this assessment project accomplished its purpose. An unbiased assessment was completed, the school-community partnership was enhanced, and local vocational program delivery is slated for improvements. In addition, a structured process for continuous review and analysis of programs has been piloted and proven successful. However, overconfidence in the demonstrated success at this particular time should not be allowed to occur. Given the degree to which the process and results were dependent upon particular characteristics of the individuals involved, the time and effort spent on planning and preparation cannot be overemphasized.

Without a doubt, valid and reliable assessment of vocational programs can be performed by local advisory councils. However, success is dependent upon the expertise and commitment of the individuals involved. Likewise, to accommodate individual differences, structure, with flexibility, is a design specification required in the process.

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